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WISCONSIN SONNETS

CHARLES H. WINKE

WISCONSIN SONNETS

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

SOME of these sonnets appeared originally in The Public and La Follette's Magazine. Others were first printed in the Sunday edition of The Milwaukee Sentinel, and in The Evening Wisconsin. Several appeared in other publications. A number of them were widely copied. This and other evidence of appeal, other than local, including letters of appreciation from different parts of the United States, prompts me to offer them in a volume.

CHARLES H. WINKE

Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground—

Wordsworth.

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WISCONSIN SONNETS

WISCONSIN

PINE and heroic hardwoods breathe low speech
Among thy northern hills, in whose deep hearts
The boon immeasurable of a hundred arts
Waits for man's need; into thy borders reach
Broad areas of prairie, and on each
Thou pilest harvest gold; high-chimneyed marts
Enhance the landscape's charm in all thy parts
And greet the dawn along thy eastern beach.

But not thy outward beauty gives thee fame,
Nor yet thy untold riches: 'T is thy men!
With the bright standard of their hopes unfurled
On the brisk air of Progress, they proclaim
Afresh the sovereignty of the Citizen,
And herald a new Freedom to the world.

THE WISCONSIN CAPITOL

HOW staid and unimaginative he
Whom sudden beauty startles not to thought,
Who could behold unstirred this structure wrought,
From base to roof, in glorious symmetry!
High-domed, huge-columned, its white majesty
And the rich hued interior have caught
Some touch of that immortal Art which brought
Renown to Athens in antiquity.

Here where such beauty has been realized,
Another God-sent Splendor makes its home—
A thought, a dream, ennobling law and life—
A bright possession not to be remised!
When Age dissolves these walls, this radiant dome,
Wisconsin, may that Presence still be rife!

THE GREAT LAKES

[By agreement between the United States and Great Britain, these waters are free from warships and other hostile activities by both nations.]

NO cannon-bristling squadrons ride at rest
Within gun-sheltered harbors on these Lakes;
Here but the urgency of Commerce wakes
The cloven waves to song, with keels deep pressed
Into their bosoms; hurrying east and west,
Trade's myriad-flagged Armada ne'er forsakes
These seas at Desolation's hest, but makes
A fruitful highway of their neutral breast.

O Shores and Oceans of the fort-stained Earth
What will the triumph of the Future be
When birds build safely in your every gun!
When all the ships innumerable that girth
Your shining vasts shall share the ministry
Of Peace and only her blest errands run!

MILWAUKEE BAY

[Viewed from The Lake Front, Juneau Park.]

HERE from this height, green-mantled, where I stand,
At the half-circle's center, musing how
A something wrought in Nature may endow
A stretch of water and a strip of land,
And the low music of the murmuring strand,
With power to stir the soul, I see the prow
Of yon huge ferry scatter like a plow
The placid blue, calmed by the air's still hand.

Not all the loveliness of earth's confined
To one much favored spot: this splendid bay,
Howe'er unfamed, would no less glorious seem
Were Naples' rapturous beauty called to mind;
Nor could its charm, on this rare summer day,
Be rivaled by the magic of a dream.

THE LIGHTED PANE

I TRAVELED lone and cheerless on a train,
Dulled by the day's monotony, till I
Beheld the splendor of the sunset sky
Hued richly in a wayside window-pane;
Then, as when bars of an old stirring strain
Enkindle heart and soul, my dazzled eye,
Struck with the beauty that so suddenly
Touched life, sent a great rapture through my brain.

Would that my days, along the common way
All mortals journey, might in somewise be
The mirror of a rich Ideal, caught
In loftiest conception, and convey,
Like the sun-gloried pane that I still see,
Their potent message to another's thought!

LANDSCAPES

AS a fair landscape lying in the night,
Effaced till dawn, bereft of all that made
It beautiful by day—hue, glitter, shade—
Regains its beauty with the morning's light,
So is man's brain a blank, until the bright,
Warm flame, Imagination, wondrous-rayed,
Floods it with impulse—then there are displayed
What glorious prospects to the inner sight!

Thus, also, is the soul a region black,
O'ershadowed by the blighting dread of death,
Until quick Spirit touch illumines it—
Then all its radiant loveliness comes back;
The soul-scape stirs as with a sacred breath,
And shines as though with God's own splendor lit.

THE FOREST FIRE

ON, on, dread Flood of Devastation! Sweep
All living things before thee; wrap in flame
The crackling, crashing forest; lay hot claim
To cot and clearing; through the grasses creep
Like angered reptile, hissing; wind-lashed, leap
From blazing hill to flame-swept waters; frame
The very heavens in red, for naught may tame
Thy fury till, too long unmoved, they weep.

Though naught but desolation mark thy train,
Rage on, red King of Ruin!—not for long
Shall thy dire victory remain complete;
With dauntless courage man shall claim again
The ashen waste, and fruitfulness shall throng
Up from the soil in gardens green and sweet.

THE GRAND PRIX—

500-MILE AUTOMOBILE SPEED CONTEST.

IN grim, terrific strife the cars spin round,
Urged to vast effort by man's mad desire.
Beating the grimy track with burning tire,
Headlong and heedless o'er the trembling ground,
Faster than rushing train, they speed with sound
Of thunder; and the feelings they inspire
Thrill the joy-frenzied multitude with fire
As of a victory, life-fraught, profound.

And yet, defying death, enduring pain
Through many a wracking, numbing, choking mile,
The drivers fail to wring from Time and Space
One jot of speed these forces may not deign
In jest to yield—illimitable the while
The stars swing on in Heaven's stupendous race.

WAR—

NOT A GOD, BUT A DEMON.

TOO long a gay adventure it has seemed;
Too long the world-old glamor of romance,
The martial glow and the rich radiance,
The stir of luring music, golden-themed;
Too long the lavish splendor we have deemed
Bespoke its soul—held its extravagance
Authentic, and its seeming puissance
Divine: of nothing braver have we dreamed!

Now let us pierce beneath the sham and show,
Beyond the lure, and feel the vultures' thrill,
See the rapacious monster as he is—
See the revolting death-streams gush and flow,
Like freshets, on the gun-swept battle-hill,
Where reeks the hideous harvest that is his.

THE GREAT WAR

THE fort-chains and intrenchments far outspread;
The puppet armies that so quickly came
To grapple in this grim, Satanic game;
The deadly aircraft hovering overhead;
The hungry siege-guns, with huge missiles fed,
More ruinous than wind or quake or flame;
And all the many marvels without shame
In cunning brains for this vast Outrage bred—

It is not merely these. It is the weight
Of murdered peace, the loss throughout the world,
That gives this War its infamous renown.
What shall it yield of good to compensate?
O piteous host to swift destruction hurled!
O torrent of the living going down!

NEUTRALITY

I AM a Teuton, or mayhap a Hun,
A Briton or a Frenchman, Slav or Pole—
Where'er the bloody tides of conflict roll
There are my kin, death-armed with blade and gun;
It matters not for me if lost or won
The battles are—how overwhelmed my soul
With joy or sorrow—I must still control
The racial strains that through my being run.

The vaunting boast and the offending gibe,
And fools that dogmatize, may cause me pain,
Yet in my heart no hatreds must be nursed;
The Nation's welfare and large aim prescribe
A higher duty than contentions vain—
In this big country none are last or first.

WILSON

[*Written on the sinking of the Lusitania by a German submarine.*]

FOR Peace this calm, far-visioned man contends,
Daring to face the calumny and blame
Of those who, passion-blinded, would inflame
The Nation's thought for false and selfish ends;
He sees, dark-imaged, what vast ill attends
Woe-breeding War, yet does not slight the claim
Of honor that is more than form or name;
Above the moment's harm his thought ascends.

Time holds but few such crises for a land,
And few wise leaders meet such fateful hour!
Though the whole world is frenzied with alarms,
No hasty word profanes this Chief's command;
And Kings shall learn Forbearance, too, is power,
That Peace is braver than the clash of arms.

CAMP DOUGLAS

[The Encampment of the Wisconsin National Guard.]

WHAT pageantry is this to daze the eyes?
A tented city spread upon the plain!
The weary traveler, gazing from his train,
Comes on the gleaming picture in surprise.
A sentineled encampment, calm it lies
Farm-bordered, foreign in this broad domain
Of Peace and Happiness. Yet, there men feign
War's brutal state, and battle dramatize.

Such is War's subtle power that even I,
Who loathe the monstrous thing, in dream became
A Hindenburg. Invincible, I swept
The enemy's expanse. How sweet to die
My loyal troopers deemed it! And my name
Like a bright meteor through Time's heaven leapt.

THE EARTH-BARQUE

I HEARD a discourse once in which the world,
On Time's expanse, was likened to a ship
For days swept helpless in a storm's fierce grip,
Her hatches fastened and her canvas furled,
Driven before tremendous seas which hurled
Their weight upon her, toyed her like a chip,
And from each mountain summit let her slip
Down steep hell-wastes, whose waters foamed and swirled.

But when at last the gale had spent its force,
As reckless anger softens to regret,
Behold what distance the staunch craft had run,
Kept, as by miracle, to her true course!
So, through the bloody crises that beset
The brave earth-barque, some gain is ever won.

SIGHT

THRICE blessed they who have the power to see!
O for a seeing soul, an open mind,
A heart made keen to pierce the mists that blind
The ways of life, through love more humanly
To think and feel, through understanding be
More largely tolerant, have wish to find
The better part in all earth's human kind,
Gain the Christ outlook through humility.

Would I might gaze as from a mountain height,
(For now I blunder in the fogs below,
Dead to life's splendor, unresponsive, base,)
And with view broadened judge all men aright;
Through sense and spirit vision learn to know
That God accosts me in my brother's face.

SOCIALISM

WHEN finally it shall be understood,
And take the color of the stateman's thought;
When Christly justice shall be truly sought
Between man and his neighbor, as it should,
Will not this lofty dream of Brotherhood—
This hint of golden ages dawning, caught
In the day's promise—then yield more than aught
That pregnant Time has yet vouchsafed of Good?

A thousand betterments have marked man's rise
Through dark days past, each but a casual boon
'Mid indescribable wrongs and follies strange;
Then need we ridicule and stigmatize
This heart-warm, glad Ideal, that so soon
Must win acceptance in the whirl of Change?

TO A TRAIN ANNOUNCER

PEAL forth melodiously, clear-throated Cryer,
Each magic name; fill the tense, crowded room
With golden tones! Out where huge sheds engloom
The day, the steeds of steel on mail and flyer
Impatient wait, and with loud blasts respire.
I pause enrapt, and while your voice's boom
Rings out, bell-like, the distant Towns assume
Forms wondrous fair, in visions you inspire:

Not longer merely Capitals of Trade,
Great throbbing Centers where unceasing strife
Is waged for favor of the monarch Gold,
But in the processes of time remade,
As man himself, they stand, their sordid life
Grown beautiful, beneficent, high-souled.

THE RENTERS

[The poor of New York spend nearly one-half of their income in rent. Thirteen families own one-fifteenth of the assessed value of real estate in that city. A like concentrated ownership of land values exists in other large cities.]

THEIR lives made heavy by unending care,
Naught but the direst poverty know these;
They labor ever for the Lords of Ease
And blindly take privation for their share.
Of hero mold, too patiently they bear
Their Atlas burden, lacking wit to seize
On any means that may their woes appease,
And free them from their thraldom of despair.

What might protects your greed, Monopoly?
Bulwarked, you laugh: "The Law." (O sacred word,
What infamies are sanctioned in your name!)
Want-deadened millions bound to slavery,
Rent-racked for a vast debt they ne'er incurred,
Nor one their golden masters long may claim!

THE CLOCK

WHAT seems more innocent than this machine
Contrived to measure time? And yet, behold
The pulse and traffic of the world controlled
By it! Enforcing schedule and routine,
It has become a Tyrant set between
Man and the freedom that was his of old,
When but the hour-glass and the sun-dial told
The pace of time, in city and demesne.

None may escape the irksome discipline
Its tireless hands impose in this grim day.
Efficiency? Perhaps, but dearly bought.
The clock's exactitude so long has been
Our life's enslaving guidance that its sway
Outreaches God's, and shapes our very thought.

EUGENICS

ALL other sciences merge into this,
All human striving in this term expressed!
How may we best transmit that which is best
To those who follow; how lay emphasis
On truth and staunch-miened beauty; how dismiss
The evil from our thinking, and divest
Our primal nature, by the beast obsessed,
Of sin's dread fruit, of greed and prejudice?

This is its problem, and it seeks to aid
Man's highest aspirations, to enhance
His meed of happiness, to make him clean;
For this the whole world's effort, the keen blade
Of Education, cleaving Ignorance,
And more than all things else, the Nazarene!

TO ROBERT M. LA FOLLETTE

[Written on his becoming a national political figure.]

YOU are the idol of your green-hued State;
Filled with a purpose that has known no pause,
You still are champion of a People's cause!
Through bitter years of conflict, early, late,
You braved the foe, unmindful of your fate,
That Privilege be banished from the laws;
And though you won the multitude's applause,
The Few heaped on you ridicule and hate.

La Follette! ours is still the ancient strife
That Liberty has waged from time unknown
Against Oppression in its changing guise;
O lighten not the labor of your life!
Unto the greater tasks to which you've grown,
Bring undiminished your brave enterprise!

ON READING LA FOLLETTE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

THIS living book he laid at Freedom's shrine,
That ardent Champion from whose fervent pen
It clarioned his sleeping countrymen:
Here stand revealed, in all their fell align,
The Interests and their minions, in combine
With servile Treason, perilous as when,
Two generations past, this Land again
Bought its release in crimson battle line.

But here stands, also, revelation bright
With staunch assurance that rekindles hope:
Once more we learn, whenever Tyrant strives
To strangle Liberty and crush the Right,
Men blazon forth (armed of the Just) to cope
The jeopardy with their high-missioned lives.

THE POET

HOWEVER impotent he may appear
Amid the world's self-seeking aims and schemes,
Still is the Poet greater than he seems:
He wields dominion o'er the realm of dreams;
His is the wondrous gift of insight clear,
Perceiving subtle truths, beyond the mere
Dull faculties of sense; he is a Seer
On whom an ever-glorious Dawning gleams.

And his the duty, yielding joy and pain,
To trace upon the ages through his art
The trials and triumphs of man's mind and heart;
Transmuting both the glory and the stain,
The worthy in man's striving and the vain,
He shapes the years, oblivious of his part.

THE AVIATOR

DAUNTLESS he circles in his white-winged ship,
Mounting with whirring motor to the sky,
Like some huge, humming man-bird! Soaring high
Where cold benumbs him, daring loop and dip,
He heeds no menace, yet, with iron grip,
Holds every sense alert: Who will deny
To falter but an instant were to die?
Destruction laughs to note each death-fraught trip.

Beneath him, through affrighting depths, appears
The outline of the world, spectral and dim;
Above him arch uncharted realms of space;
What forces has he conquered! and what fears!
What undreamed victories shall yield to him,
And through his bold adventures, to the race!

DYNAMITE

SYMBOL of death and dire calamities
It seemed to me, until I grasped what meant
Such might stupendous, made obedient
To man's aggressive will. A Hercules
In every stick, what vast immensities
Of plan and project owe accomplishment
To it! With it man rends a continent,
Cleaving a channel, sheer-walled, for the seas.

In this dread substance earthquake has become
Commodity; this marvel of their thought
Mankind deem commonplace, dream not its worth.
God's proudest mountains to its shock succumb;
,Wherever its shattering blast bursts forth is wrought
The miracle wherewith man conquers Earth.

CONCRETE

[At the Annual Cement Show at Chicago.]

YOU deem it all a too prosaic theme?
I scorn your judgment, critic. Wonder fills
My heart, knowing this product of the mills
Shall make immortal Architecture's dream.
Henceforth of beauteous pearl, her towers shall gleam
Imperishable, eternal as the hills
Whose very bone this is, now as man wills,
Shaped to his thought, of stone the stone supreme.

A hundred centuries in vain man sought
An adamantine substance. The earth's dust
Yielded at last. City and river bed
We now may build as the Creator wrought;
And when our age is gone, for die it must,
They shall remain, its greatness not all fled.

TO A PUGILIST

SWIFT gliding through the rounds, I see you still
Under bright lights, your glistening body wet
And dripping, like some swimmer's, with the sweat
Of your great toil; and as the furious mill
Grinds fiercely on, I marvel at the skill
With which you flit from danger, hard beset
By your blood-covered foe. Tireless, you fret
Him with your well-aimed batteries, until

Conviction forming with the conflict's trend,
Thrilled by your sure, compelling mastery
Of thought and action timed to fine accord,
The crowd acclaims you victor ere the end:
This is the knowledge you have wrought in me—
In any art, Perfection spells Reward.

BATTLE

IT is the day of days, the hour of hours!
It is an instant, or a century;
Ay, it is Time; perhaps Eternity
Is endless test between exhaustless powers.
It is a boon, a blessing that endowers
With might and wealth, yet ever it must be
A sacrifice, woeful calamity,
A pitiless force that crushes and devours.

A test of strength it is, the supreme trial,
That utmost ordeal of intensity
Toward which the arduous years and eons run;
It is endurance, patience, toil, denial,
A tireless quest, and always, victory
Is but a step toward vaster goals unwon.

DOUBT

BORN of despondency in moments blind
With self-disparagement, it casts a shade
On all life's hopes; the brightest prospects fade
Beneath its dread negation; to dissuade
Is its fell mission; faithless, it can find
Some fatal flaw in every project mind
Or heart proposes, and its fetters bind
To failure all on whom its spell is laid.

Doubt, daring naught, with cringing soul denies
What freer vision labors to create;
It magnifies the small and dwarfs the great;
It questions Truth, in Faith would recognize
Naught but adherence blind, and in its eyes
Death looms, the final cruel blow of Fate.

SINCERITY

KNOWN but to the true souls that realize
The emptiness of feigning, and how vain
The artifices sham and show contain,
It is the virtue through which mortals gain,
And keep unbroken, the ennobling ties
Of friendship and of love; by it we rise
To life's high call, and even Paradise
May be reward of those who it attain.

Sincerity! it is that heavenly thing
Which blends divinity with word and deed,
And makes of Love the world's one deathless creed;
It is the air on which the angels wing,
The soul of all sublime accomplishing,
The bond by which all good is guaranteed.

WORDSWORTH

HE worshipped Nature as no bard before,
And found in her innumerable forms the soul
That holds the universe in vast control:
In shade-gloomed valley and mid mountains hoar,
By lake and stream, on the resounding shore,
And in the cloud-massed sky,—in the least scroll
Of her deft hand and the harmonious whole,
He found the Primal Being more and more.

His eyes were blest with more than mortal sight,
And on his ear the magic eloquence
Of Nature fell a fresh, celestial chime;
In the ecstatic seasons of delight
When Inspiration yielded thoughts intense
He wrought the noble structure of his rhyme.

SUMMER STORM

THE blinding lightning flashes, and the boom
Of deafening thunder shakes the firmament;
With it the sound of flooding rain is blent
In raging torrents, beating through the gloom.
But lo! the dread, impending hand of doom
Forbears at last—light suddenly is sent,
And then, all unaware, the storm is spent,
Leaving a silence heavy as the tomb.

The aching eye, behind its quivering shield,
And tortured ear, in expectation wait
For the tumultuous storm's continued play;
But stillness reigns above the wood and field,
A wildbird whistles to his waiting mate,
And awe and terror in the heart allay.

AN AUTUMN SUNSET

THE great red ember of the sun sinks low.
On canvas of gray clouds at dusk amassed
Rapt Nature paints a masterpiece surpassed
Nowhere in Art; its far-flung, fiery glow
Illumes the firmament, until the flow
Of darkness westward, slow, and then more fast,
Engulfs its brave magnificence at last,
And day succumbs to its relentless foe.

And as I gaze in wonder on the sight,
While yet the splendor heightens to its prime,
A sense of awe upon my spirit gains:
Within that vast expanse of vivid light
I see portrayal, glorious, sublime,
Of Him whose presence there eternal reigns.

NOTES

NOTES

THE WISCONSIN CAPITOL

The beautiful capitol at Madison was completed in 1916. It is built of Bethel, Vt., granite and cost over seven million dollars. Its interior shows many varieties of marble, making a riot of color at once striking and wonderfully harmonious.

THE GREAT LAKES

The following is an editorial which appeared in the Milwaukee Daily News following the reproduction of "The Great Lakes" in The Literary Digest, Nov. 14, 1914:

"The Great Lakes"

Charles H. Winke, a Milwaukeean, has the distinction of having his poem "The Great Lakes," recently published in The Public, copied and commented on by The Literary Digest. As there are thousands of poems from which The Digest has its choice, this is a compliment of considerable value.

In comment, The Digest says:

"By a well wrought sonnet we are reminded that not all of the waters of the world can be blood-stained. Mr. Winke is rather too fond of the hyphen—'cannon-

bristling,' 'myriad-flagged,' etc.—but the thought was worthy of expression, and he has expressed it well."

This thought that not all the waters of the world are now blood-stained is an excellent one to keep before the public. There are these inland seas upon whose bosoms float the great commercial ships carrying food and supplies from one city to another, transports of peace and of good will. It is well to remember that when cannon boom on the mighty oceans, the big vessels on the lakes are shuttles weaving through the warp and woof of the waters a friendliness and good will between the people of a number of cities and of two different countries.

Mr. Winke's poem is timely and fine with contrasts. It is splendid that such wide attention should be brought to the fact that:

"No cannon-bristling squadrons ride at rest
Within gun-sheltered harbors on these Lakes;
Here but the urgency of Commerce wakes
The cloven waves to song, with keels deep pressed
Into their bosoms; hurrying east and west,
Trade's myriad-flagged Armada ne'er forsakes
These seas at Desolation's hest, but makes
A fruitful highway of their neutral breast."

MILWAUKEE BAY

This is not the only poem that Milwaukee and its beautiful harbor have inspired. A fine poem entitled "Milwaukee," by Mark Forrest, was printed in the Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin. A striking bit of poetic work entitled "Juneau Park, Milwaukee," by Jules Jenkins, appeared in the Milwaukee Sentinel. There may be others of which I have no knowledge. My sonnet appeared in La Follette's Magazine and was reprinted in several of the Milwaukee dailies.

NEUTRALITY

When I submitted this sonnet to The Public, where it appeared, the last line read: "American am I—not last but first." The editor, Samuel Danziger, returned it with the objection that this line seemed to express a sentiment too much like "Deutschland ueber alles" or "Rule Britannica." I am not in sympathy with the narrow nationalism these slogans imply, and not wishing to be misunderstood, I changed the line to its present reading. In accepting the changed version Mr. Danziger wrote: "The poem now is unimpeachable."

SOCIALISM

I have never been a socialist in a party sense, but I believe we are moving toward a higher order of human relationship, and that in time all government will be, not merely democratic, but socialistic. That a richer and better humanity will be the result no one can doubt. "To A Train Announcer" is expressive of this thought also. "Socialism" was printed in the Milwaukee Sentinel; "To A Train Announcer" in The Public.

EUGENICS

This sonnet was written after reading the following little essay by Dr. Frank Crane, which I append because of its comprehensive view of this subject:

The One Science.

After all, we have but one great problem before us: How shall we best transmit to children the fruits of our effort?

Education: how shall we put them in possession of the knowledge we have gained, how classify that knowledge for their use, how train them to employ it?

Apprenticeship: how shall we give them the advantage of our experience?

Government: how preserve for them the results of our economic experiments?

The Church: how hand on to them the gains of our spiritual life?

Law: how maintain for them what we have learned by experience concerning justice between man and man?

Literature and Art: how pass on to them the vision and inspiration we have had?

Business: how give them the products of our work?

Hygiene: how divert from them our diseases and endow them with our health?

There is but one universal human science, Eugenics.

TO ROBERT M. LA FOLLETTE

This sonnet appeared in The Public in 1912 when Senator La Follette was put forward by the progressive Republicans for the Presidency. It was widely copied at the time. After the publication, in The Public also.

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of the sonnet "On Reading La Follette's Autobiography," I received an appreciative letter from Senator La Follette in which he said: "The one to myself I read with feelings deeply stirred, when it appeared. The other is so good that I shall republish it in the Weekly."

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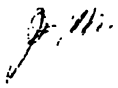
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